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A SHAKESPEARIAN SET OF CHINA.

BY MRS. MARY C. HUNGERFORD.

"Pray thee, let it serve for table talk."

WHEN dessert plates are offered at the modest price of four hundred dollars a dozen, and two thousand dollars is the sum asked for a super-elegant dinner set, as can be verified by consulting the current advertisement of a popular firm, ordinary people are penetrated with the depressing conviction that none but "bloated aristocrats" can afford to fittingly furnish their tables.

But ladies with a talent for painting can, and do decorate china so beautifully that their table ware may be as gorgeous as the high-priced gems of art that find purchasers among the opulent or extravagant classes. China is but brittle stuff to largely squander time or money upon, and a woman who can be mistress of herself when a thirty-five dollar plate falls, is worthy to be enshrined and sainted. The care of such china, even for a house-keeper of steadiest nerves and saintliest temper, must be more than the pleasure of its possession, so those who can neither purchase nor paint anything so handsome, need not pine with envy. Neither need they settle down into the dissatisfied condition of believing that their tables must be coldly furnished forth with monotonous, unsympathetic, white china, for no knowledge of painting whatever is required to transform the white china into a Shakespearian set which will do more to suggest conversation than the most elaborately decorated ware.

Guests at a table have a natural objection, unless extremely intimate, to speaking of the appointments they quietly observe, perhaps their very admiration makes them silent, and silence is not golden at a dinner table where "gay discourse helps on digestion;" but where there is a legend on each piece, it is quite naturally read, talked about and compared, and the guests have, at least, one ready-made topic of general interest—if they require it.

A few tubes of mineral colors must be procured, wine-red, rose-pink, and dark blue are reliable and effective. By the aid of tracing paper, unless the decorator has a very correct eye, a band, an inch and a half wide, may be drawn diagonally across each plate, saucer, and dish, or cover. The band should be covered with a plain color, and, to give variety, the dishes for each course may be uniform in color. The motto selected should be written in script upon the white portion of the china. The writing can be done with a small brush and may, with good effect, be of a different shade from the band. It will take a long time for the paint to dry sufficiently to be fired. Any china dealer can give the information necessary to find a place where the process of firing the china can be accomplished. Without adding materially to the cost, a quarter-inch band of gilt can be added to the edge of each piece, thereby much increasing the beauty of the set.

Selecting suitable mottoes will be a pleasant excitement for dull winter evenings, and probably a close scrutiny of Shakespeare will reward the searcher with many more appropriate sentiments than those suggestively given here, as the result of a cursory and hurried scanning of a few of his most prominent plays.

For the early courses the fish dishes, oyster plates, etc., such mottoes may be used as—

"I prythee let me bring thee where crabs grow."
 "I'll fish for thee."
 "To break fast with what appetite you have."
 "Nature must obey necessity."
 "Why, then the world's mine oyster."
 "Either at flesh or fish, a table full of welcome makes scarce one dainty dish."
 "For a fish without a fin, there's a fowl without a feather."
 "Prepare for dinner."
 "Abstinence engenders maladies."
 "There is salmon."
 "Eat of the fish."
 "If I bring thee not something to eat, I will give thee leave to die."
 "Dinner, ho dinner!"
 "Can'st tell how an oyster makes his shell?"

"Be bounteous at our meal."
 "Why, nothing comes amiss."
 "Good company, good wine, good welcome."
 "We'll feast each other e'er we part."
 "Welcome, my fair guests."
 "Weak with toil, yet strong in appetite."
 "How many things by season, seasoned are."
 "Strive mightily, but eat and drink as friends."
 "Season your admiration for a while."
 "We kill the fowl of season."
 "I pray you, jest sir, as you sit at dinner."
 "Good sister, let us dine and never fret."
 "His effect of gravy, gravy, gravy."
 "Eating the air on promise of supply."
 "'Tis dinner time, quoth I."
 "Our cheer may answer my good will, and your good welcome here."
 "Small cheer and great welcome make a merry feast."

"Better cheer may you have, but not with better heart."

"Revel and feast it at my house to-day."

"He hath bid me to a calf's head and a capon."

"Shall I not find a woodcock too?"

"Dainty bits make rich the ribs, but bankrupt quite the wits."

"And damned be he who first cries, hold! enough."

"Nay, let me praise you while I have a stomach."

"Oh, dainty duck."

"Oh! heavens, I have my wish. Four woodcocks on a dish."

"What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild fowls?"

"Say, sweet love, what thou desirest to eat."

"Thou shalt not die for lack of a dinner."

"The meat is cold, because you came not home."

"The pig, quoth I, is burned."

"Eat and drink as friends."

"If you give me any conserves, give me conserves of beef."

"Good meat, sir, is common."

"What's this, mutton?"

"What say you to a dish of beef and mustard?"

"A dish that I do love to feed upon."

"Let the sky rain potatoes."

"I am one that is nourished by my victuals, and would fain have meat."

"Good things should be praised."

"Here is everything advantageous to life."

"A dish fit for the gods."

"If 'twere done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly."

"Good sister, let us dine and never fret."

For a bread plate the device might be—

"Ceres' blessing still is on you."

For the butter dish—

"Didst thou never see a Titan kiss a dish of butter?"

For a cheese plate—

"'Tis time I were choked with a piece of toasted cheese."

For a punch bowl there is a choice of several sentiments—

"Here's to thy health, give him the cup."

"Now the king drinks to Hamlet."

"As thou art a man, give me the cup, it is meat and drink."

"Come, give us a taste of your quality."

For the dessert service there are many pertinent sayings in Shakespeare's pages. For the centre fruit dish a good text is—

"The prodigality of nature."



SKETCH FOR ARRANGEMENT OF HALL AND STAIR CASES.

"Who can cloy the hungry eye of appetite by bare imagination of a feast?"

"I do feast to-night."

"Besides your cheer, you shall have sport."

"A thing of custom."

"More matter with less art."

"Open your mouth."

"Now good digestion, wait on appetite!"

For meat, poultry, and game courses, some sentiments may be culled from the following list of quotations:

"Here's metal more attractive."

"I must eat my dinner."

"Well, here's my comfort."

"Sit down and feed, and welcome to our table."

"A good piece of flesh indeed."

"A most celestial banquet."

"A good digestion to you all."